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Kosovo: Impact Of 24 September FRY Elections In Kosovo

United Nations Special Representative to Kosovo Bernard Kouchner this month publicly announced that he would allow the 24 September FRY elections to be organized and carried out in Kosovo, but stated that the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) would not assist Belgrade in its election preparations or implementation.

- Yugoslav politicians have begun their campaign in Kosovo, which offers FRY President Milosevic an important source of votes in the FRY presidential and parliamentary elections.

Belgrade is establishing voting stations for Kosovo Serbs in southern Serbia, and Serbian officials this month announced plans to set up hundreds of polling stations in Kosovo as well.

- Some local Kosovo Serb leaders loyal to the regime will almost certainly set up polling stations, perhaps in private homes, although not on the scale announced by Serb officials.

Kosovo Albanian political leaders are resigned to UNMIK's decision to allow voting in Kosovo, and do not condone efforts to disrupt polling. However, scattered acts of violence are likely to occur, especially if Albanians come into close contact with Serb voters.

- Intra-Serb violence could also occur in Serb-dominated regions such as Kosovska Mitrovica where the vote is particularly contentious and pre-election violence recently erupted.

Kosovo Serbs would not view a Milosevic victory as a surprise. Those who support the opposition would be disappointed with the result, but continue to focus on providing for their own community. Regime loyalists, meanwhile, would be emboldened, at least in the short term.

- In the event of massive demonstrations Serbia-wide, some Kosovo Serbs might be amenable to increased cooperation with the international community, particularly if it also entailed additional assistance.

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FRY Election Campaign Heats Up In Kosovo

United Nations Special Representative to Kosovo Bernard Kouchner this month publicly announced that he would allow the 24 September FRY elections to be organized and carried out in Kosovo, but stated that the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) would not assist Belgrade in election preparations or implementation.

- Kouchner agreed to provide security for those voting in the FRY elections in Kosovo, but banned the use of public buildings for the ballot, according to press reports.

Even before Kouchner's statement, Yugoslav politicians had begun their campaign in Kosovo, which offers the regime an important source of votes—obtained legally or through fraud—to help boost Milosevic's prospects in the elections. Holding the elections in Kosovo also reinforces the regime's claim that Kosovo remains part of the FRY.

- Gorica Gajevic, secretary general of Milosevic's ruling Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), kicked off the regime's campaign in the central Kosovo town of Gracanica in late August and, *in a blatant attempt to try to buy the political support of Kosovo Serbs*, promised the crowd that new homes would be built for returning Serbs.
- Following up on Gajevic's pledge, the Belgrade-controlled FRY Committee for Friendship and Cooperation in Kosovo in September outlined its plan to assist Kosovo Serbs by building new homes, providing improved transportation to and from Serbia, and supplying Serb farmers with fuel and provisions, according to press reporting.

This report was prepared by analysts in the DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force.

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Kosovo Votes Available to Milosevic

The Yugoslav Federal Election Commission in mid-September announced publicly that 7,861,327 voters are officially registered for the 24 September FRY presidential and federal elections. In the southern Serbian districts of Vranje and Prokuplje, to which Kosovo now belongs following electoral law changes in July, a total of 1,512,501 voters are registered, according to the Commission.

- *Roughly two-thirds of these, or just under 1 million registered voters, likely reside in Kosovo; the vast majority are ethnic Albanians.* There are approximately 100,000 Kosovo Serbs remaining in the province.
- Belgrade has also set up provisions to allow the approximately 80,000 Kosovo Serb refugees in Serbia to vote in FRY elections.

The Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) has been slower off the mark in initiating an election campaign in Kosovo, largely because its leaders assume that Milosevic will continue his tradition of stealing Kosovo Serb votes despite their efforts. DOS politicians contend that the lack of election observers in Kosovo makes the province fertile ground for election fraud.

- Senior DOS member and Democratic Party Chairman Zoran Djindjic recently stated publicly that the opposition would not recognize a single vote from a polling station in Kosovo if an opposition member does not observe the casting of ballots.

Belgrade's Plans To Conduct FRY Elections In Kosovo

The FRY Assembly on 24 July passed an election law gerrymandering the electoral boundaries of the FRY, absorbing three Kosovo electorates into the southern Serbian districts of Prokuplje and Vranje, which are SPS strongholds.

- The Prokuplje electorate includes Kosovska Mitrovica and Pec as well as another 14 municipalities, according to press reporting. The Vranje electorate includes Pristina and nine other Kosovo municipalities.
- Kosovo Serbs are expected to travel from the province to Prokuplje and Vranje to cast their votes. In addition, Belgrade officials last month announced publicly that "special" polling stations would be established elsewhere in Serbia wherever more than 100 displaced Serb voters reside. *The votes of displaced Kosovo Serbs, regardless of where they are cast, will count towards the Vranje and Prokuplje electoral districts.*

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In addition to the polling booths in Serbia, Belgrade officials publicly claim that as many as 500 polling booths will be established in Kosovo [redacted]

Kouchner in mid-September predicted that only 13,000 to 15,000 Kosovo Serbs would vote in the province, with perhaps another 500 crossing into Serbia to vote [redacted]. Kouchner also [redacted] he expects no more than fifteen polling stations to be erected in Kosovo. [redacted]

Kosovo Serb Reaction to September Ballot [redacted]

Leading Kosovo Serb politicians overwhelmingly applauded Kouchner's early September decision not to prevent the FRY election from being held in Kosovo, but otherwise have differed in their response to the September ballot.

The moderate Gracanica Serb National Council (SNV) announced this month that it would not participate in the election out of fear that it would cause divisions among Kosovo Serbs and provide Milosevic the opportunity to use Kosovo votes to remain in power.

- The more hardline Kosovska Mitrovica SNV led by Oliver Ivanovic initially announced its plans to boycott the elections, but Ivanovic later

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reversed his position and announced his support for opposition candidate Kostunica for FRY President.

- The pro-Belgrade Kosovo Serbian National Assembly (SNS) in northern Kosovo in early September announced its plans to support Milosevic, laying the groundwork for confrontation between it and Ivanovic. [redacted]

Tensions within the Kosovo Serb community are likely to increase as elections approach, perhaps resulting in violent incidents. In mid-September, DOS presidential candidate Kostunica—who has a track record of defending Kosovo Serb interests—traveled to the divided town of Kosovska Mitrovica in an attempt to try to win Kosovo Serb votes from Milosevic, but a fiery crowd of Milosevic supporters hurled tomatoes and rocks at him while he was giving a speech.

- Press reports indicate that violent clashes between Ivanovic loyalists and regime supporters broke out in Mitrovica earlier this month. Ivanovic publicly accused Belgrade of trying to bribe his supporters to vote for members of the ruling coalition in FRY elections. [redacted]

Kosovo Albanian Reaction to September Ballot [redacted]

For Kosovo Albanians, the UNMIK decision to allow the FRY elections to be carried out in Kosovo came as an unwelcome surprise. [redacted]

- Both Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) Chairman Ibrahim Rugova and rival Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) Chairman Hashim Thaci stated publicly this month that they “would not recognize the outcome of any election in Kosovo that Serbs intended to hold.”

[redacted]

Leadership sentiments notwithstanding, violence could erupt if Kosovo Albanians come into close contact with Serb voters. Polling stations in regions with large Serb populations—such as northern and northeastern Kosovo—will be easy for KFOR to protect and are likely to be relatively safe. However, smaller Serb enclaves in eastern

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and central Kosovo—as well as any Serb convoys traveling between Kosovo and Serbia—will be more vulnerable to attack.

The Aftermath

Kosovo Serbs almost certainly assume that FRY President Milosevic will remain in his post after elections—legally or otherwise. However, the Kosovo Serb community is not monolithic and there will likely be mixed reaction to the election results.

- *The majority of Kosovo Serbs still view Milosevic favorably, probably in part due to their lack of Serb independent media outlets in Kosovo and Belgrade's provision of pensions and stipends to the Kosovo Serb community. The election result will likely embolden these Serbs and intensify their hope that Kosovo will soon return to "its rightful place as part of the FRY."*

- *Kosovo Serbs tied to the opposition will reluctantly accept the result, recognizing that their immediate priority is their local Serb community, not events in Serbia.*

Should Milosevic win elections through blatant fraud and subsequently face massive Serbia-wide demonstrations, Kosovo Serbs—if aware of the scale of social discontent in Serbia—may reassess their relationship with the FRY President, especially if a

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viable alternative is waiting in the wings. Such a scenario could strengthen moderate and opposition voices in the province and perhaps cause some Belgrade loyalists to seek new sources of support for their community.

- *However, Kosovo Serbs will not turn to cooperation with the international community overnight. Some may accept Belgrade's propaganda line that opposition demonstrations are a Western scheme to remove the Belgrade regime.*
- *Local Kosovo Serb leaders, though, may begin to hedge their bets and seek alternative sources of social and financial assistance for their constituency, creating an opportunity for the international community to create some distance between Belgrade and the Serb community by providing some assistance of its own.*

Kosovo Albanians will ignore the election results. After years of suffering under his regime, Kosovo Albanians tend to perceive the FRY President as unassailable and view current efforts to oust him as ineffective.

- *Kosovo Albanians are unlikely to find any comfort in a Serbia governed by a nationalist Kostunica. Kosovo Albanians almost certainly fear that a successor government in Belgrade would cause international attention and resources in the region to shift from Kosovo to Serbia and, possibly, derail their efforts to eventually gain independence.*

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